

Rise 100

Chapter 100: Miscellaneous Affairs Before the Provincial Examination

"Not even fully grown, and you want to tease your sister." After a moment of stunned silence at Zhu Ping'an's earlier antics, the girl teased with a smile.

It was unknown who was scared enough to draw their knife.

Zhu Ping'an responded with a disdainful smile and sat down at the table, savoring his breakfast.

"Aren't you curious why the Imperial Guard comes to search but ignores me?" The girl, sitting opposite Zhu Ping'an, took small bites of fried dough sticks and finally couldn't help but lift her head to ask him.

Zhu Ping'an paused his chopsticks, shrugged slightly, and said nonchalantly, "It's merely because you were masked during the assassination attempt, and it was night; no one recognized your face."

"You're really boring!"

Upon hearing this, the girl pouted, lowered her head to eat her fried dough sticks and tofu pudding, and after a while, she kicked Zhu Ping'an's chair with her foot.

"What now?" Zhu Ping'an asked in exasperation, putting down his chopsticks.

"How much money do you have left?" The girl randomly stirred her tofu pudding in the bowl, showing some disdain.

"What for?" Zhu Ping'an casually asked and continued eating his breakfast.

"I see there are plenty of fat sheep at the inn. If you can help me out tonight, we..." The girl's eyes sparkled as she spoke, her whole demeanor like she was on a high, seemingly forgetting about her previous injuries.

Zhu Ping'an, who was drinking his tofu pudding, suddenly sprayed it out.

In the nick of time, the girl sitting across the table quickly moved her fried dough sticks and tofu pudding outwards, narrowly avoiding the splatter from Zhu Ping'an.

A rabbit wouldn't eat the grass near its burrow, yet this little lady was ready to act right in her own inn, and she hadn't even cleaned up the mess from the assassination yet. Now she wanted to add theft or robbery to the mix? Did she want the Imperial Guard to rest at all? They were not to be trifled with. Besides, it wasn't like his uncles didn't know her; they would want to keep their distance, yet she was eager to push forward.

"If it weren't for your severe poverty, I wouldn't have to entertain such thoughts. I'm not an old fool who would die without tasting meat," the girl placed all the blame on Zhu Ping'an.

Zhu Ping'an...

In the end, Zhu Ping'an did not agree to the girl's proposal but promised he could add a meat dish to his meals once a day, of course, only after the girl wrote a promissory note for ten taels of silver.

Time passed slowly after that, filled with practicing calligraphy, morning readings, and studying the eight-legged essay, as if the girl, who could never seem to quiet down, didn't exist in the room.

One day, after practicing calligraphy and reading in the morning, he was on his way back when he was stopped by a group of scholarly students.

"Isn't this Brother Zhu, who flies in and out of the reed flowers? What a coincidence to meet you!" The first to greet him was a well-mannered young scholar dressed like a gentleman, who was Xia Luoming from Tongcheng, praised by Zhou Xuezheng at the Immortal Poem Conference. He had a humble smile on his face, but there was an air of arrogance between his brows.

"Brother Zhu, it's a pleasure to meet you. I am Feng Shanshui from Susong County." Following Xia Luoming was a young scholar in his early twenties, quite handsome, outshining Zhu Ping'an in looks by a long shot.

Soon after, the others also began to greet him warmly.

"Oh, good morning, everyone." Zhu Ping'an clasped his black wooden board and returned the greetings.

"What a coincidence! We, the top scholars from various counties, have gathered by Taihu Lake to exchange insights and compose a few poems. This is the last poetry gathering before the provincial examination, so Zhu Xian-di absolutely must not miss it!" Feng Shanshui from Susong County made some small talk before inviting Zhu Ping'an to join them for the poetry gathering.

Another poetry gathering—Zhu Ping'an naturally did not intend to attend.

"Oh, I'm very sorry, but I have some pressing matters to attend to. I truly appreciate your kindness, but I'm afraid I must decline this time," Zhu Ping'an apologized, clasping his wooden board, and prepared to turn away.

Just as Zhu Ping'an expressed his apologies, Xia Luoming interjected, "Brother Zhu, please don't decline. We're all gathered by Taihu Lake; why not come along? Moreover, the top scholars from several counties are here as well, and you absolutely should not miss this opportunity."

After Xia Luoming finished speaking, Feng Shanshui continued, "Brother Zhu, your line about 'flying into the reed flowers and never being seen' truly captures the essence of snow. We are all gathered here in admiration of your literary talent, and if you don't show up, won't that disappoint us?"

"I really do have important matters to attend to, and besides, I am not skilled in this area, so I won't trouble you any further," Zhu Ping'an replied once more, clasping his hands in apology.

"You are being too modest, Brother Zhu. Your talents in literature, whether in farewells or describing snow, have left us all in awe. At today's poetry gathering, why not leave behind a piece of your work? After we finish, we can reminisce about it, and that would be quite a lovely thing," Feng Shanshui encouraged.

"Exactly! If Brother Zhu leaves behind a piece of work, it will surely become a great story for the provincial examination in the future."

"Right! Let's go, let's go!"

The people around them also chimed in enthusiastically.

Zhu Ping'an continued to gently refuse everyone while holding his black wooden board. "I'm really sorry, but I'm not skilled in poetry. Each time I write a poem, it takes me several days to finish. I'd rather not embarrass myself at an occasion like this."

"You're being too modest, Brother Zhu. Your line about 'flying into the reed flowers and never being seen' has already left us all feeling ashamed."

"Exactly! Don't be so polite, Brother Zhu. Come along with us!"

"We're all waiting for your masterpiece!"

The accompanying scholars kept urging Zhu Ping'an to join them for the poetry gathering.

"I'm truly sorry, but I really do have urgent matters to attend to. I won't trouble you any further. Excuse me,"
Zhu Ping'an clasped his hands in a respectful bow and squeezed his way out of the crowd, still holding his black wooden board.

As they watched Zhu Ping'an's retreating figure, the group began to murmur among themselves.

"Seriously, why act all high and mighty? That poem was a mess; only the last line was decent."

"Too ostentatious."

"Fishing for fame and recognition."

"He must be afraid, afraid he can't come up with a poem in public..."

"Forget it, Feng bro, Li bro... let's head to the Taihu poetry gathering."

Their discussions were lively, neither too loud nor too soft, just enough for Zhu Ping'an to hear bits and pieces.

Zhu Ping'an paid no mind to it, leisurely returning to the inn. In the lobby, he simply ordered two dishes and a soup, placed them in a food box, and headed upstairs. Poetry gatherings were just pointless frivolities; it was much better to take the time to read more books.

Meanwhile, the poetry gathering by Taihu Lake was in full swing. The top scholars were competing against each other, presenting poem after poem, and indeed, a few good pieces circulated among them. Naturally, the news of Zhu Ping'an's repeated refusals to attend the gathering spread, painting him as someone afraid he wouldn't be able to produce poetry on the spot, thus adding to the atmosphere of the event and contributing to its story.

Time flew by quickly after the poetry gathering, almost in the blink of an eye, the provincial examination was about to begin.